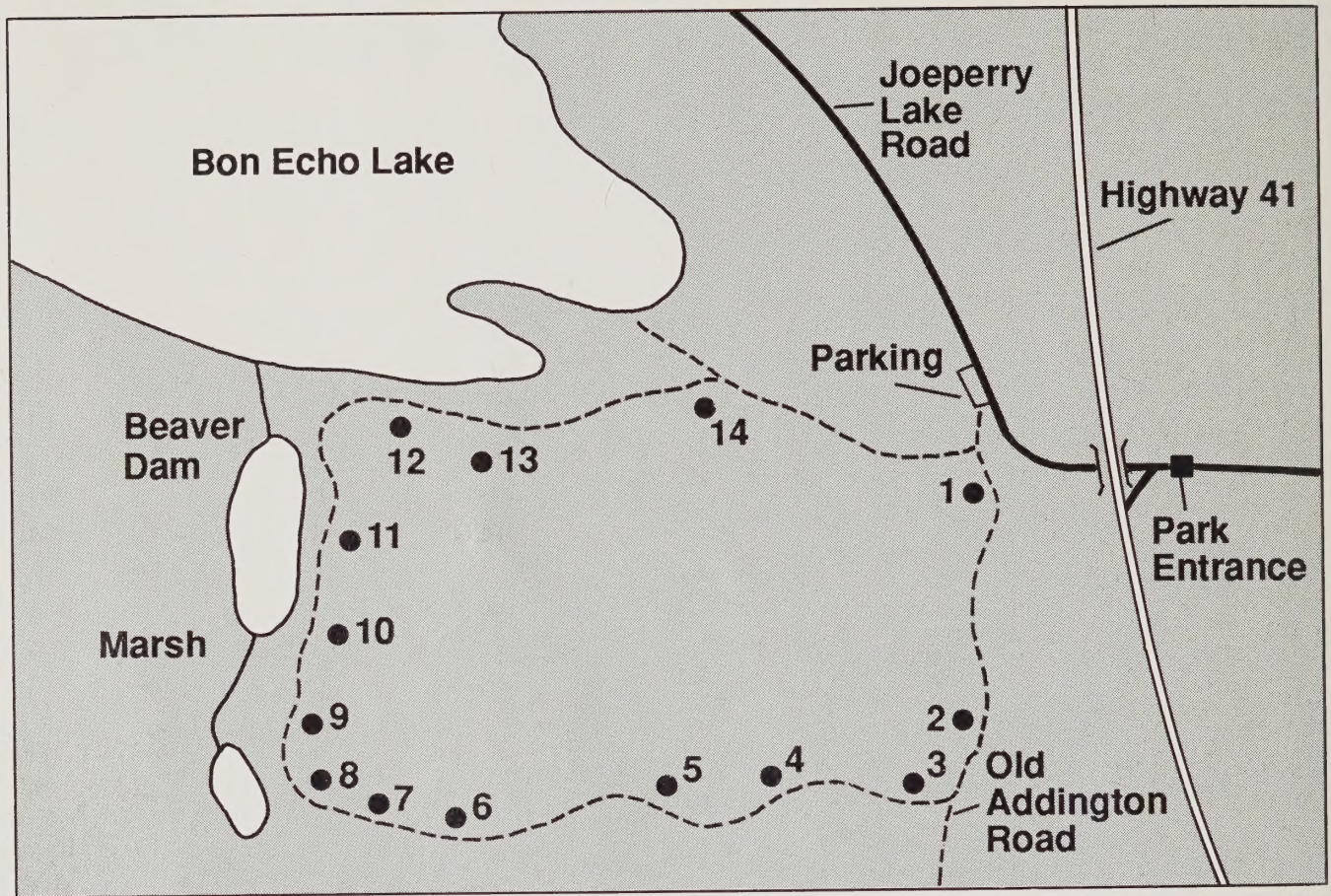


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The Shield Trail

Bon Echo
Provincial Park





North 

The Shield Trail A Rugged Landscape and its People

“It is obvious that the most important thing about any country is the land. It is the land that makes the people, molds their character and determines their well-being as individuals or nations. It is from the land that they draw their spiritual and economic sustenance: it is to the land that they give back their love and devotion.”

This land, the Precambrian Shield - “In the south a gloomy immensity of forest, rocks and winding waterways. To a few the Shield offered a way of life that was precarious and brutal ... but to most it presented a challenge to be avoided at all cost.”

These are the words of Merrill Denison - famous writer and previous owner of Bon Echo.

In the Bon Echo area a battle has been waged for more than 120 years. Lumbermen, farmers, miners and tourism developers have all entered the battle in turn - each attempting to tame the wild Shield and extract a living from it. To this day the area has remained virtually ‘unconquered’ as far as concentrated settlement is concerned. The Shield Trail will acquaint you with this rugged landscape. Your hike begins at the parking lot just west of Highway 41 along the Joeperry Lake Road. This is a loop trail 4.8 kilometres long. Allow 2-1/2 hours to complete it.

Post 1

The Canadian Shield: “Ground-Down Stumps of Vanished Mountain Ranges”

The Canadian Shield is a vast expanse of Precambrian bedrock which covers half of Canada in a broad shield shape. It was formed by the solidification of molten material between 600 million and 4-1/2 billion years ago. In Ontario this ancient bedrock forms the surface of three quarters of the province. An arm of the same formation extends under the St. Lawrence River, forming the Thousand Islands and continues into New York State as the Adirondack Mountains.

No one knows what kind of plants and animals lived in this area before the glaciers came and scraped everything away. The glaciers came and went four times. These were huge sheets of ice two kilometres thick, exerting a pressure of 9 billion tons per square kilometre of land!

This pressure was enough to cause the lower layers of ice to become plastic and start to creep. As they crept, they bit into the land, picking up large boulders and other debris and, like giant sandpaper, they scoured and re-scoured what a London Times correspondent in Canada during the 1880's described as “the ground-down stumps of vanished mountain ranges.”



Post 2

The Addington Road: 1st Trail From Clareview To The Madawaska



The Royal Mail

You are walking along the remains of the Addington Road - the first road ever built into this area. The isolated character of the district kept it totally undeveloped until the mid 1850's. At that time Ottawa legislators were considering opening up the Shield to agricultural settlement - partly to stop the flow of Canadians to the U.S. and partly because of the pressure from strong lumber interests. The powerful lumber barons wanted roads to open headwater areas for further logging and they needed farmers to produce cheaper supplies for the lumbermen.

Ottawa went ahead with the construction of several "Colonization Roads". One of these was the Addington Road - which started at Clareview (56 km south of here) and ran north to the Madawaska River - a distance of 90 km. The cost worked out to about \$82. per kilometre!

Construction began in 1854 - and was completed in 1856. The Addington Road, little more than a wagon trail, served the area until Highway 41 was built in 1935.

Post 3

An Abandoned Mine? The Search For Mineral Wealth

Behind the bushes to the left of the Addington Road you will find an excavation into the side of the hill with fallen timbers over it. Is it an abandoned mine? It certainly never produced anything of value - there are no records of successful mines within the park. But it was common practice for prospectors to make exploratory pits as they travelled over the Shield. Perhaps at some time in the last 75 years a hopeful geologist stripped away the soil and surface rock, didn't find those sought-after veins of gold or silver, and moved on.

Although the rocks hindering your passage probably contain nothing of value, the Shield is a treasure chest: rich in gold, silver, nickel, copper, uranium, iron and other minerals.

Surface finds of gold and mica generated great interest in the Bon Echo area in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The principal gold mines included the Golden Fleece (Addington Mine), the Ore Chimney (Bey Mine), the Star of the East and the Big Dipper Mine. None of these are in existence today; the ore was of too low a quality to justify the expense of extraction.

The other mining venture in the district involved white muscovite mica. The mine, located near the head of the Mazinaw, yielded very high quality mica but with poor transportation facilities and declining markets, the mine could not compete with cheaper southern sources.

People had been optimistic that mining would bring back the economic stability of the white pine era. The Tweed News, April 4, 1935 predicted "a population of 2,000 in Northbrook within 2 years," but it was not to be. The present population stands at just over 300.

Post 4 Farming: A Losing Battle



Clearing The Land

The Addington Road was built and the enticement went out:

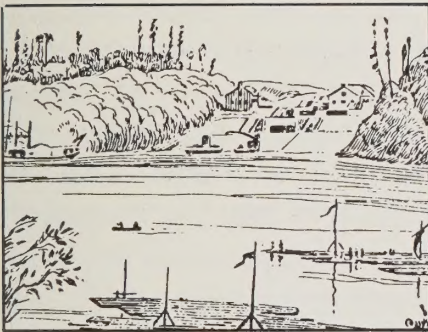
"FREE GIFT LOTS ... excellent soil and climate along the road, abundance of water, heavy timber - almost always the best ... the value of land doubles every ten years."

The lots were free, but ... the 100 acre "gifts" were surveyed without any attention paid to how much arable land they contained. Winter temperatures sometimes reached 40 below zero, late spring and early fall frosts restricted crops and the black flies terrorized the settlers. More realities of the Shield

were encountered when the land was cleared ... rock, thin soil, poor drainage ... and more rock!

Disillusioned, settlers began to pull out. Those who remained began to see salvation by the 1870s in the lumbering operations. There was a market for their meagre crops and work in the lumber camps in winter. The area reached an economic peak in the 1880s and it looked like the Shield might be conquered.

Post 5 The White Pine Era



Log Rafts On The Ottawa River

These rocky ridges crowned with white pine, stand as a shadow of the last logging era. Relatively untouched prior to the 1800s - the pine grew in excess of 100 feet, with a diameter of 3-5 feet!

When Napoleon, emperor of Europe, cut off Britain's lumber supply from the Baltic in the early 1800s, the British turned to the forests of the Canadian Shield. To rebuild the battered Royal Navy, white pine (and later red pine) were cut and squared to fit the holds of ships and sent to Britain. The long straight pine brought a good price as masts and timbers of sailing vessels.

After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, Britain was able to re-establish a timber agreement with the Baltic. Canada lost her market - but only temporarily. The United States was pushing westward, building booms were on, and soon lumber was again at a premium.

The area around Bon Echo was involved in the square timber trade to a minor extent during the 1820s but was not logged extensively until the Addington Road was built in the mid 1850s.

From 1870-1890, the area experienced economic stability. Lumbering created the only boom the area was ever to experience. By 1890, however, the major lumber concerns had taken what they wanted and moved north. Large-scale lumbering was finished, and so too was the farming which had supplied the camps.

Post 6

Glacial 'Erratics': Boulders In The Ice

This massive boulder is characteristic of the rugged nature of the Shield. It was left behind by a retreating glacier about 10,000 years ago. We call it an "erratic" because it is out of place; it was carried here by the glaciers from a place further north.

If you look at the other side of the erratic you will see that the rock has cracked. This was caused by water freezing in its tiny crevices. Ice thus formed can generate pressures in excess of 10,000 pounds per square inch.

Post 7

A Fallen Tree

Why do trees fall over? More than likely the soil was so thin at this point that a high wind was able to overturn it. The Shield has a very thin cover of glacial 'till' and organic matter. A large forest can grow only because the matted roots hold the soil and its nutrients in place. The early settlers had the mistaken belief that if the soil could grow huge trees it would also grow good crops. Once the forests were cleared, however, erosion depleted what little soil there was. It takes many years for a regenerating forest to rebuild the soil.

This fallen tree will eventually be decomposed by fungi and bacteria. Its nutrients will then be worked back into the soil by insects and worms - to be used by future generations of trees.

Post 8

Fire: Another Setback

Have you noticed the burnt tree stumps as you walked along the trail? They stand as grim reminders of the ravages of the past. Following the logging operations in this area in the 1870s and 1880s, fires swept through the tinder dry debris that was left behind. The fires were just one more hardship to be endured by the early settlers. Fires removed much of the humus layer of the soil, contributed to erosion, and posed a direct threat to their homes and belongings.

Post 9

Scourge of the North

“Rest for awhile, that is, if you don’t mind being lunch for the black flies and mosquitoes.” In the battle to tame the Shield, these bloodthirsty insects have certainly not been on the side of man.

The water systems of the Shield are ideal for the larvae of both black flies and mosquitoes. The cool, shallow and turbulent waters of the Shield’s countless streams provide the high oxygen levels required by black fly larvae which attach themselves to objects in the water; while the still waters of endless ponds and swamps are the required habitat of mosquito larvae. The mosquitoes lay their eggs on the water surface, and the newly hatched larvae breathe undisturbed through “breathing tubes”.

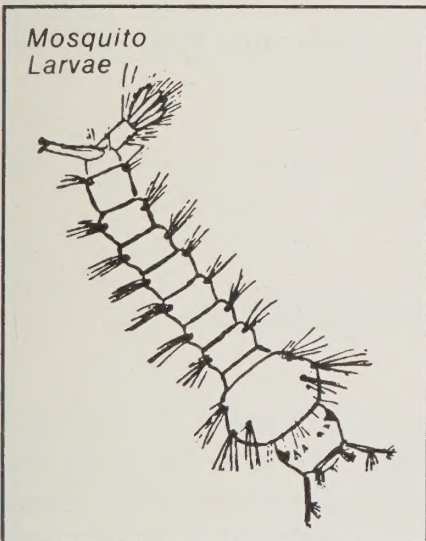
Only the females are bloodsuckers. They use the blood to produce eggs. The mosquito inserts a tube and sips, whereas the black fly cuts a hole in her victim with saw-edge mouthparts and laps up the blood.

Breeding and biting in the brief, crucial summer working season - it is not surprising that these insects have had a profound effect on the settlement and development of the Shield.

Post 10

The Beaver: An Important Ally

Although beaver were absent from this pond for several years, they have now come back. Beaver are very much at home in the waterways of the Shield. They provided the early settlers with food, clothing and an income from fur sales. Many of the early farmers who were losing the battle to convert rockland into farm soil during the summer only managed to survive because of their winter traplines. Today there are more beaver than ever and many residents of the Bon Echo area still trap to supplement their incomes. The annual beaver harvest in Ontario is worth several million dollars.



Post 11

The Marsh: Wilderness Food



The marshy areas of the beaver pond contain many edible plants. The Native people were familiar with all of them and some of this knowledge was passed on to the early white travellers and settlers.

The arrowhead or duck potato is recognized by its arrowshaped leaves and white flowers in whorls of three. The starchy tubers buried in the muck are dug out (they cannot be pulled), washed and eaten raw, or more often roasted like potatoes.

All parts of the cattail are edible: the young shoots in the spring; the pollen; the flowers; and the rootstock which was frequently ground into flour. The cattail down was also used for diapers.

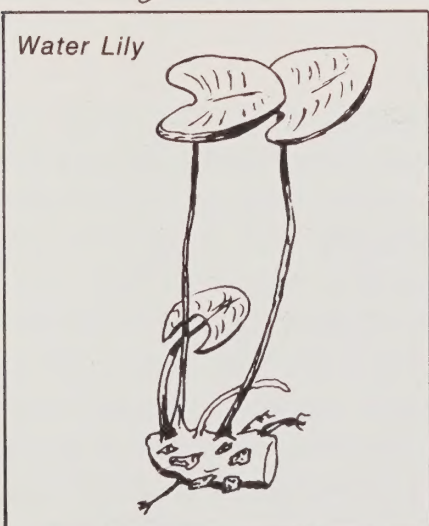
The water lily roots were occasionally boiled, roasted or used for flour. The seeds were also parched and eaten or ground into flour.



Post 12

A Log Run: Hot Sand For A Dangerous Sleigh Ride

“This was the site of an old log run.” During the winter, horses drew log-laden sleighs through the bush and down this hill to the frozen lake. Fires were built beside the log slides to heat sand which was thrown onto the icy slide to prevent the sleighs from slipping out of control. The logs were transported over the ice to a portable mill at the end of the lake for sawing. The lumber was then trucked out of the area.



Post 13

Tourism: The Last Stand

The Shield - a craggy, scarred, empty land of forests, rocks and cold, deep lakes - the features which once frustrated the early settlers now attract summer visitors. Tourism was introduced to Bon Echo in the 1890s when an inn was built at the narrows on Mazinaw Lake. Before 1935, Bon Echo was attractive only to the wealthy.

After Highway 41 was opened in 1935, and with the advent of higher incomes and more leisure time, recreation opportunities in the area became available to anyone who owned a car.

The provincial government acquired the resort and surrounding land, and began development in 1959. Bon Echo Provincial Park was officially opened in 1965. Bon Echo Lake, spread out below you, is just one of thirteen lakes contained within the Park's 6,644 hectares (16,417 acres). Known locally as Stoney or Lowjohn, the lake has a V-shape as a result of glacial activity. Come this way again and try your luck with a fishing rod - Bon Echo Lake is home for northern pike, smallmouth bass and yellow perch.

Post 14

End of The Trail

Follow the path back to the present and the end of the Shield Trail.

We hope you enjoyed your walk and have gained a better understanding of the Shield environment and its influence on the development of the Bon Echo area.

Please join us for the many interpretive activities scheduled throughout the camping season ... and for more information inquire at the Visitor Centre.

Illustrations by C.W. Jefferys
- courtesy The Public Archives of Canada

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The Friends of Bon Echo Park is a nonprofit co-operating association dedicated to assisting Bon Echo Provincial Park in achieving their goals for the protection of park resources and in furthering educational and interpretive programs and projects.

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